



League of Women Voters of the South Bend Area

For Immediate Release
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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS LAUNCHES PROJECT TO BOOST 18-YEAR OLD VOTE

The 2008 election was heralded as one in which young voters voted in unprecedented numbers. But while it's true that 91 percent of young people registered to vote actually turned out in 2008 to cast a ballot, the sad truth is that *over half* of American 18 year-olds are not registered to vote – and this at a time when 24 percent of the voting age population is under 30.

The League of Women Voters of the South Bend Area is determined to beat that statistic and is launching the 2012 High School Registration Project – a three-month blitz to register newly-eligible high school students to vote, educate them on the importance of civic engagement, and follow up prior to the 2012 primary and general elections to remind and encourage them to vote.

As the trial year for this program, the League will conduct presentations in six area high schools. Five are confirmed at this time – Mishawaka High School and South Bend's Adams, Clay, Riley, Rise Up Academy at Eggleston, and Washington high schools. The program targets high school students because studies show students who do not go on to college are less likely to register than those who do. This program seeks to register students and help them understand the importance of their vote regardless of their future education plans.

Although the program will run from January 15 to March 15, 2012, the League will conduct three early presentations to 90 students in classes at Washington High School on Thursday, December 15, 2011. Mary Schmanski, Social Studies Department Chair at Washington High School, has worked with the League to schedule the Washington events, which will take place in the required senior-level Government classes taught by Schmanski and Lisa Jarrett. League co-president Lisa Plencner will conduct the presentation, assisted by a team of League volunteers.

Schmanski has also appointed student Gemmi McIntosh to serve as student liaison to the League on this project. At each school, the student liaison will provide feedback on the effectiveness of the classroom presentations and also serve as a communications link to students and the community on the importance of civic education.

Lisa Plencner comments: "We're thrilled to be working with the dedicated faculty and staff at South Bend Washington to make sure students know their rights and know the critical role they play in our community's future. Young people are an increasingly influential part of the electorate. In 2012, Americans under age 30 will represent nearly a quarter of the electorate. From strengthening the economy to building safer communities and making education more affordable, today's youth are fired up and ready to roll up their sleeves to build a stronger America."

The League of Women Voters is conducting the 2012 High School Voter Registration Project with a team of about 20 League volunteers, along with student volunteers from the Political Science Club and American Democracy Project at Indiana University South Bend. Steering committee members are League co-presidents Lisa Plencner and Kelly Sanford, League vice president, Elizabeth Bennion, and 2012 High School Voter Registration Project chair, Geri Pawelski.

Local chapters of the League of Women Voters across the country are conducting similar registration projects, following test projects conducted in 2010. The League of Women Voters of the United States (www.lwv.org) created and tested the pilot program and is providing guidance and support to local Leagues.

The South Bend Area League was awarded grants from both the League of Women Voters Education Fund and the League of Women Voters Indiana Education Fund to provide financial support for the project in our area.

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